

Long Island Botanical Society

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Summer 2005

Saving The Prairie: The Hempstead Plains on Long Island

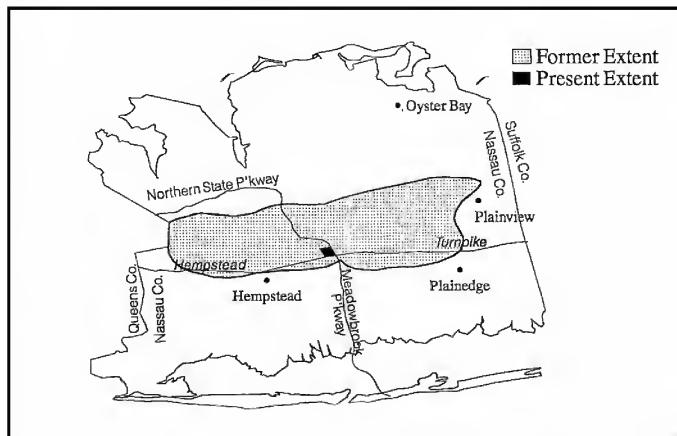
Betsy Gulotta

If you have entered Nassau Community College's campus at the East Parking Area from Charles Lindbergh Boulevard, you have probably noticed a fenced-in grassy area called the Hempstead Plains. This special parcel of land belonging to the College is the last remaining piece of a very large (up to 60,000 acres) and unusual tall-grass prairie that once covered the central part of Nassau County, from the Queens border to the Suffolk border (Fig. 1).

Imagine wandering through a large meadow with grasses as high as yourself and visible as far as your eye can see. Imagine seeing golden, blue, and lavender wild flowers all around you. This is what the settlers encountered when they first arrived on Long Island over 300 years ago. Native prairie grasses, identical to species found on Midwestern prairies, were common. Birds, foxes, snakes, and insects were also abundant in this habitat (Fig. 2).

Through years of settlement and development, the Hempstead Plains was a desirable area for cattle grazing, agriculture, horse racing, and commercial and residential development. Villages such as Plainview, East Meadow, Plainedge, Garden City, and Floral Park were established. Known as the "cradle of aviation," the Hempstead Plains was the site for significant early airplane flights and Mitchell Field was established to serve the military. Nassau Community College, Hofstra University, Nassau Coliseum, and the Marriott Hotel were also built there.

In the 1970s and 1980s, local citizens and Nassau Community College faculty recognized that the Hempstead Plains was disappearing rapidly, and began to take measures to preserve what was left. Some of the plants and animals were so rare that they were added to the Endangered Species list. For example, sandplain gerardia (*Agalinis acuta*) is known from only 12 populations in five (U.S.) states, with the second largest population existing on the site. The College, under President Sean



Map by L. Paul

FIG. 1. Originally, the Hempstead Plains covered nearly 60,000 acres across Nassau County; today it occupies less than 60 acres in the center of the County.

Fanelli's guidance, was committed to saving the last acres of prairie and contracted with The Nature Conservancy in 1988 to help preserve and manage the 19 acres on College property.

In 2001, a new organization was established to manage the Hempstead Plains: Friends of Hempstead Plains at Nassau Community College, Inc. A not-for-profit organization, established through a partnership between Nassau Community College and The Nature Conservancy, Friends of Hempstead Plains is dedicated to preserving, restoring, and offering educational programs about the Hempstead Plains.

In its five years of operation, Friends of Hempstead Plains has developed a management plan to protect the endangered species and rare habitat, remove non-native invasive plant species, and improve and restore native habitat. It has also developed and offered tours, volunteer community participation days, classes,

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Long Island Botanical Society

Founded: 1986 Incorporated: 1989

The Long Island Botanical Society is dedicated to the promotion of field botany and a greater understanding of the plants that grow wild on Long Island, New York.

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www.libotanical.org

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Society News

President Eric Lamont reported on the status of the trip to Newfoundland in July of 2006, the year of LIBS' 20th anniversary. Karl Anderson will lead the trip and 12 people have expressed interest so far. Contact Eric if you'd like more information about the trip.

Margaret Conover related that a campus committee at Stony Brook University has been formed to assure sound management and legal protection of the Ashley Schiff Park Preserve, a 26-acre woodland established in 1970 on the campus. The preserve contains princess pine, trailing arbutus, partridgeberry, and shinleaf. Since there is no existing species inventory for the woodland, the committee plans to host a bioblitz in the spring of 2006 and hopes that LIBS members will participate.

Karen Blumer described her efforts to save the Overton Preserve in Coram from development. More information on this 450-acre property can be found at the following Web site: <http://middlecountryrdproject.org/Overtonpreserve.html>

Rich Kelly relayed that he and Skip had made a foray to the Blydenburgh Preserve in April and found: *Huperzia lucidula* (shining clubmoss); *Lycopodium × habereri* (a hybrid between *digitatum* and *tristachyum*—Haberer's clubmoss); and *Lycopodium hickeyi* (Hickey's clubmoss [segregated from *obscurum*]).

At the June 12 field trip to Wertheim Wildlife Refuge near Shirley, led by Jenny Ulsheimer, LIBS members observed a good growth of *Utricularia inflata* (swollen bladderwort) on a pond along the trail. This is a very rare plant in New York. *Astragalus canadensis* (milk-vetch) was discovered on the lane leading in to the preserve. This species has never been reported from Long Island and only once from New York.

Andy Greller reported on the progress to save Grace Forest [LIBS newsletter Vol. 15 (1), p. 6]. He reported that five or six acres have already been denuded but there has been no further development. The North Shore Land Alliance (Lisa Ott, president) has been fighting for it. Andy heard from Peter Scully at the DEC that one-fifth of the acreage has been classified as wetlands.

Skip Blanchard found another location of *Spergula morisonii* (Morison's spurry) in a Great River recharge basin. This member of the Pink family was introduced from Europe and has only been seen one other time in New York, also on Long Island and by Skip. It is also known from New Jersey. It is not currently included in the Invasive Plant Atlas of New England (IPANE).

John Potente gave an update on the *Platanthera lacera* (ragged-fringed orchid) that he carefully removed from Elsa L'Hommedieu's place four years ago. [See LIBS Newsletter Vol. 14 (4), p. 27] Each year it comes up with another shoot; this year it produced four.

The New England Invasive Plant Summit will be held September 16–17, 2005 in Framingham, Massachusetts. For more information, visit www.ipane.org and click on "2005 Invasive Plant Summit" in red at the bottom of the home page.

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and workshops on site. Most of the work is carried out by volunteers and members of the organization.

In 2004, at the request of the Friends, botanist Eric Lamont performed a botanical survey of the site. He identified 185 species of native (54%) and non-native (46%) flowering plants between April and October. Prior to 2004, the most recent botanical survey of the same site was done in 1987, by Lamont and Stalter, documenting 171 species of vascular plants, including 38% non-native. Former studies of the vegetation on the Hempstead Plains were done in 1973 (Wayne Seyfert), 1937 (Cain *et al.*), 1912 and 1918 (Harper), and 1892 (Henry Hicks), when the Hempstead Plains covered a much larger area.

The globally endangered species, sandplain gerardia (*Agalinis acuta*) grows in a small area within the site. It was monitored annually by The Nature Conservancy during the 1990s, and it continues to be closely monitored by the Friends with assistance from The Nature Conservancy. Each year when the plant blooms at the end of August, volunteers count every plant and monitor the distribution. Sometimes seeds are collected and spread in nearby areas in order to help increase the population.

A comprehensive management plan to remove invasive species combines methods tried by The Nature Conservancy as well as some new experimental approaches. The continued sprouting and growth of woody shrubs is one of the main problems on the prairie, and requires ongoing attention. In 2001, soon after the Friends began management, LIPA offered its heavy brush-hog equipment and labor for three days to begin to remove the invading shrubs on the Hempstead Plains. Friends of Hempstead Plains continues the ef-



Fig. 2. Upland sandpiper, *Bartramia longicauda*, once common on the Hempstead Plains, is no longer found there.

fort by holding regular weekend community volunteer workdays in the spring and fall to encourage local citizens to help with the cutting and removal of shrubs. In addition, at least two Boy Scouts have earned their Eagle Scout Awards by helping to do the same (Fig. 3).

One of the most invasive non-native plants is mugwort (*Artemesia vulgaris*). Mugwort has aggressive underground rhizomes and roots, but it is thought that constant mowing of the above-ground vegetation may weaken the plant. Selective mowing of areas of intense mugwort invasion was begun by The Nature Conservancy, and is being continued by the Friends. Friends of Hempstead Plains also began a hand-weeding project of selected areas of mugwort, to determine the effects of repeated weeding. So far, the effect has been to thin growth, but not totally eliminate it. In addition, one of our volunteers, Ralph Foster, devised a method of using large pieces of canvas to cover areas of new spring growth. He placed canvas tarps on a 10×10-meter plot in early spring, left them in place for two to three months, and then removed them. Most of the mugwort growth was halted and only a few plants sprouted that year. However, intermittent sun-deprived plants of native milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) and Indian hemp (*Apocynum cannabinum*) quickly recovered and grew rapidly when the tarps were removed.

The control of non-native cypress spurge (*Euphorbia cyathophylla*) has been another challenge. The plant is spreading throughout the site and encroaching on the endangered sandplain gerardia's habitat. The Nature Conservancy tried without success to eliminate this invasive plant by mowing, hand weeding, and using herbicides. Friends of Hempstead Plains learned about a beetle, called the cypress spurge beetle (*Aptthonia flavis*) that eats exclusively cypress spurge and leafy spurge, a



Fig. 3. Clearing woody shrubs at the Hempstead Plains has enabled two Boy Scouts to earn their Eagle Scout Award.

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close relative. It has been raised at the University of Rhode Island, for the purpose of eliminating spurge from cattle grazing pastures in New England. During their active season in the summer, adult beetles eat the leaves of the plant, whereas in the winter newly hatched larva feed on the roots.

During July 2002 and 2003 the Friends received shipments of 1000 and 1200 beetles, respectively, from the University of Rhode Island (Fig. 4). Equal numbers of beetles were released in each of two sites dominated by cypress spurge. They were monitored throughout each summer by Dr. Lisa Filippi, biology professor at New College at Hofstra University. She determined their numbers and how far they spread, as well as changes in amount of cypress spurge. To date, it appears as if one of the sites shows a slight reduction of cypress spurge, and no significant change has occurred in the other site. Significant changes usually take several years to appear.

As invasive plant species are removed from selected areas, it is imperative to replace them with native seeds or vegetation before there is an opportunity for non-native plants to return. One of our restoration management projects is to collect seeds from native grasses and wildflowers in the fall (when these plants go to seed) and broadcast them in areas where needed. It is becoming evident that this is a daunting project, as the amount of seeds necessary to cover a small area is huge. Seed-collecting days established for volunteers yield only a fraction of the seeds necessary. So far, we have no significant results on the success of broadcasting native seeds in areas where mugwort has been cleared.

Much discussion has centered around the possibility of doing a prescribed burn on the Hempstead Plains. Midwestern prairie ecologists recommend burning as one of the most effective prairie management tools. Although The Nature Conservancy carried out three burns in small areas on the site in the 1990s that resulted in very little change or benefit, Friends of Hempstead Plains hopes to conduct additional burns, incorporating larger areas to determine if repeated burning will be more effective. We have already received attention and interest from United States Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners in Wildlife Program to do a burn on the Hempstead Plains as one of their pilot projects in New York State.

Friends of Hempstead Plains at Nassau Community College looks forward to the challenge of restoring the Hempstead Plains tall-grass prairie and valuable diminishing grassland habitat for the wildlife that depends on it. As a not-for-profit organization, the



Fig. 4. Cypress spurge beetles, *Aphthona flavis*, were released at each of two sites during summers of 2002 and 2003.

Friends of Hempstead Plains relies on members and volunteers to support our efforts to conserve this rare and precious habitat. To find out how you can help, please call (516) 572-7570 or e-mail info@friendsofhfp.org

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Betsy Gulotta is the conservation project manager for the Friends of Hempstead Plains at Nassau Community College.

Is Norway Maple a Threat to the Natural Woodlands on Long Island?

Wei Fang

Most of us on Long Island are very familiar with Norway maple (*Acer platanoides*) and the robust, symmetrical, and dark crown it forms. It can be seen on streets, in our backyards, and on the fringes of many nature preserves. In the spring, it is the first tree to send out tender green leaves. Every fall, it is the last tree to shed its leaves. Unlike its native cousin, sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), Norway maple was not present in the North America until the 1760s, when William Hamilton introduced it to Philadelphia from Europe (Spongberg, 1990). It gained popularity as an ornamental species for two highly desirable features. First, it is highly plastic and subject to foliage color manipulations. Cultivars of Norway maple vary from the deep purple of "Crimson King" to the dark greens of "Emerald Queen," and "Emerald Lustre™." The fall colors are just as variable, with some turning brilliant yellow, while others stay red. Second, it endures the air pollution and compacted soil of harsh urban environments and remains virtually disease-free. It was considered to be the number one planted street tree in the U.S. by the late 1990s (Webb, 1996).

In recent years, people have observed Norway maple expanding from its ornamental realm into the peripheral parts of nature preserves and parks, forming single species (monospecific) stands and producing barren ground in the understory. Increasing public awareness about the potential negative effects of alien species has led to speculation about the ecological impact of Norway maple in these places, the last refuges of native vegetation. However, we know that a pure stand of certain species can simply be the result of random dispersal to a forest gap or an abandoned lawn, and therefore should not be used as the sole evidence of the invasiveness of a species. A combination of spatial study and experiments is needed for further scientific assessment.

During 1999–2002, I conducted a vegetation survey and a series of field experiments to assess the ecological impact of Norway maple on the community composition and ecosystem of natural woodlands on Long Island. A detailed spatial analysis of the survey data showed that the population of Norway maple is expanding and invading the interior of the studied forest, and that this population expansion is associated with a decrease in both species diversity and recruitment

of native woody species (Fang, 2005).

By estimating mortality based on standing dead trees, I determined that the population importance value¹ of Norway maple increased from 28.1% to 38.5% over the years, while the importance value of oak (*Quercus spp.*) decreased from 33.4% to 26.9% over time. Norway maple had much lower mortality (number of standing dead versus number of both living and standing dead individuals: 6.69%) than most native species in the mapped area (*A. rubrum*, 17.76%; *Cornus florida*, 22.67%; *Quercus spp.*, 11.36%; *Sassafras albidum*, 8%; and all native trees together had a mortality of 23.46%).

The younger stages (seedlings, saplings, and juveniles) of Norway maple were distributed progressively farther beyond the established older adults into the interior of native forest. This cannot be simply caused by seed rain because none of the five dominant native tree species had young adults distributed farther back towards the Norway maple monospecific stand and the transitional zone than older adults. The null hypothesis of random dispersal to a forest gap was therefore falsified with statistical significance.

There were negative correlations of Norway maple density and densities of native species of different functional groups (including trees, shrubs, and vines, but not herbaceous plants), and negative correlation of Norway maple density and species diversity in forest understory. The null hypothesis of no suppression over native species from Norway maple invasion was falsified with statistical significance.

At the same time, certain exotic vines (especially Japanese honeysuckle, *Lonicera japonica*) and shrubs (especially winged euonymus or burning bush, *Euonymus alatus*) were found to thrive near the Norway maple, as suggested by their significant positive correlation with Norway maple density. The invasion of Norway maple will very likely have far-reaching effects on the community composition of woody species and dynamics of its neighboring native community.

The results of subsequent experiments conducted in the same study areas were consistent with the survey study. Further ecosystem measurements suggest that Norway maple has a superior ability to compete for

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¹ "Importance" in plant ecology has a much narrower meaning than in normal use. As used here, it is a numerical measure of the significance of a particular species in a plant community. It combines three other measures, each of which emphasizes a somewhat different aspect of a species' significance. In this particular study importance represents the average of a species' percent relative abundance (RA), percent relative frequency (RF), and percent relative dominance (RD).

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light, and that it changes soil chemistry dynamics in a way that leads to a higher nitrogen loss from the soil. These two major mechanisms work together and result in the negative impact of Norway maple on the community composition and ecosystem dynamics of natural forests on Long Island.

The good news is that Norway maple is gradually dying out on urban streets, and is often not replaced by further planting. As for the natural woodlands, whether the invasion will last or not is a question that needs a longer time to address.

This article is dedicated to everyone who has helped me in my Ph.D. thesis research

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Wei Fang received her Ph.D. from the Department of Ecology and Evolution at Stony Brook University. She is currently an assistant professor at the Long Island University-Brooklyn campus.



Great Pond Wetland Preservation Committee Report

Lillian Ball

At the April 20 trustee meeting at 1 a.m., the Southold Board of Trustees unanimously voted to revoke the permit given in 2002 to build in the middle of the Great Pond Wetlands. Nine months after we first appeared before them, Al Krupski, Trustees president, cited the persuasive new biological information showing all the lots targeted for preservation in the Great Pond Wetlands as part of a globally rare "maritime freshwater interdunal swale." This is an unusual, brave decision and we thank them for their serious review of all the botanical reports we obtained.

On April 12, the Southold Town Board of Trustees voted to contribute land tax funds to the preservation purchase of our first wetlands lot with the Peconic Land Trust. Moreover, they voted to include all 13 lots of the Great Pond Wetlands on the Community Preservation List, which allows the town to contribute to future acquisitions in our wetlands. Melissa Spiro, land preservation committee chair, and Josh Horton, supervisor, along with the entire board were very supportive of our fundraising community outreach efforts.

Finally, on April 5, the Suffolk County Legislature approved a planning steps resolution presented by Legislator Caracciolo and Tom Isles, of the Planning Department, to move forward in the process of acquisition of the Great Pond Wetland. The endangered selen-

der blueflag (*Iris prismatica*), native cranberries, and carnivorous sundews will now have a chance to thrive along with all other the other wildlife in this fragile ecosystem. It is a long process but one that we hope will lead to the ultimate preservation of the area for generations to come.

I am exhausted but thrilled at the outcome of all our hard work. In addition to the above governmental entities, we have the support of the New York State-Natural Heritage Program, the New York Department of State, North Fork Environmental Council, and the Audubon Society. The National Fish & Wildlife Foundation has just awarded us a Long Island Sound Futures grant for restoration and education. We have also had four excellent articles in the Suffolk Times. Thanks to all of you who contributed time and money. There will certainly be more work and fundraising to come in order to preserve all the currently vacant lots. However, this process has reaffirmed my faith in democracy. It also demonstrates the effect ordinary people can have when they stand up to save the beauty and significant environmental purpose of nature.

Lillian Ball is the chair of the Great Pond Wetland Preservation Committee, Kenney's Beach Civic Association.

Long Island Native Grass Initiative

Ed Toth

On Thursday, April 7, 2005, a meeting was held in Riverhead at the offices of Cornell Cooperative Extension to discuss the desirability and practicality of developing bulk seed stocks of native Long Island grasses. These stocks would be used in natural area restoration and management efforts throughout Long Island and would be desirable from an ecological viewpoint since stock developed from local genotypes will help preserve remaining wild populations of these species found on Long Island and from an economic viewpoint because of the greater survivability of plantings and seedlings done from local genetic stock. Currently, there is no source for local bulk seed products on Long Island. Area projects may be using seed from as far away as the prairie states and/or highly selected varieties with limited environmental adaptability.

The meeting was the brainchild of Polly Weigand of the Suffolk County Soil and Water Conservation District and others, and included representatives from the

SCSWCD, Cornell Cooperative Extension, The Nature Conservancy, The USDA/Natural Resources Conservation Service, Peconic Land Trust, local growers and vineyards, as well as others. Growers and vineyards were included as a unique part of a potential partnership in which documented seed stock of known local origin would be turned over to Long Island growers to plant and increase on their lands and sell as an agricultural commodity to projects needing bulk seed, through a process that would include certification of the origin of seed (so called source-identified seed). The effort is tentatively being called the Long Island Native Grass Initiative. Those interested in more information on the Initiative should contact Polly Weigand.

Ed Toth is the director of the Greenbelt Native Plant Center of the City of New York, Department of Parks and Recreation.



Field Trips

SATURDAY, JULY 16, 2005

William Floyd Estate

This previously announced field trip has been cancelled because of a heavy tick infestation.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 6, 2005, 9 A.M.

Van Cortlandt Park, Bronx, New York

Trip leader: David Künstler

Visit Vault Hill Meadow with its buttonweed (*Diodia teres*), Northwest Forest with sanicle (*Sanicula spp.*), and perhaps the Tibbets Brook system (Van Cortlandt Swamp) with lizard-tail (*Saururus cernuus*). This is a joint trip with the Torrey Botanical Society.

Directions: From the Major Deegan Expressway take the Van Cortlandt Park South exit, bear or turn right/west to Broadway, right to the 242nd Street area and park. Meet at VCP headquarters on Broadway.

SUNDAY, AUGUST 14, 2005, 9:30 A.M.

North Patchogue pine barrens, North Patchogue, New York

Trip leader: David Künstler

See newly discovered and globally rare oak brush plains with New York threatened narrow-leaved white-topped aster (*Sericocarpus linifolius*), New York rare pitch

pine-oak-heath woodland with thyme-leaf pinweed (*Lechea minor*) and a globally uncommon/New York endangered coastal plain stream running through a globally uncommon/New York threatened red maple-tupelo swamp with sheep laurel (*Kalmia angustifolia*). These rare habitats are found along with the more common and familiar pitch pine-oak forest with its downy false foxglove (*Aureolaria virginica*). This is a joint trip with the Torrey Botanical Society.

Directions: Exit 54 on Sunrise Highway, go north about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the second left onto La Bonne Vie Drive West to the parking lot at end.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2005, 10 A.M.

Totoket Mountain, North Branford, Connecticut

Trip leader: Chris Mangels and Penni Sharp

This is a natural area located in New Haven County where Chris has done some previous work. It is a fairly accessible section of trap rock ridge summit featuring rich woods and scattered wetland depressions, with many interesting late season species.

Directions: Meet in Bridgeport, CT to carpool. Consult the LIBS Web site for complete directions. www.libotanical.org

More Field Trips →

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2005, 10 A.M.

*Queens County Farm Museum,
73-50 Little Neck Parkway, Floral Park, New York*
Trip leaders: Andy Grelle and Jim Trent (president,
Queens County Farm Museum)

We will tour the grounds of this "working" farm, with the objective of preparing a list of the plants growing without cultivation on the grounds and surrounding natural areas. There are orchards, vineyards, truck-croplands, barns, a greenhouse, fields, secondary woods, and an old growth black oak forest on the front slope of the terminal moraine, where it meets the outwash plain on the northern boundary of the farm. It is the last remaining forested front slope in Queens County. We will look for remnants of the "Little Plains," a northwestern appendage of the Hempstead Plains that had been reported for easternmost Queens County.

Directions: Grand Central Parkway to Exit 24 (Little Neck Parkway). South on Little Neck Parkway three blocks to the Museum entrance; or L.I.E. to Exit 32 (Little Neck Parkway). South on Little Neck Parkway one mile to the museum entrance.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2005, 10 A.M.

*William Cullen Bryant Preserve of Nassau County,
Roslyn Harbor, New York*
Trip leaders: Andy Grelle, Skip Blanchard, and Jean Henning

We will prepare a checklist of the plants growing without cultivation in the W.C. Bryant Preserve. In addition to the historical Childe Frick collection of northern hemisphere conifers (Clayton Pinetum, originally planted with about 25 genera and 190 species; plus a later planting of about 30 species of ferns), and some magnificent cultivated hardwoods, the Preserve has a number of interesting and beautiful natural features. There is a deep, V-shaped ravine with a rich mixture of hardwood trees, rich upland forests dominated by tall red oaks and tuliptrees, a swamp forest of pin oaks, a young woodland of tuliptrees and sweetgums, a magnificent meadow of *Aster laevis* and *Solidago speciosa* that is maintained by mowing, lawns with statuary, and kettle ponds.

Directions: LIE to Exit 39 (Glen Cove Road). Go north about a mile and a half to Route 25A. Turn left on 25A, go about 400 yards, and look for the large sign to Nassau County Museum of Art. This is on the right and immediately east of the viaduct over Roslyn Harbor/Hempstead Bay. Turn right under the LIRR trestle and, following traffic arrows, bear to the left for about 200 yards to the entrance of the large, main parking field. Meet in the northeast corner of the main parking lot, an area that is immediately west of the entrance pathway to the Childe Frick Mansion.



Upcoming Programs

September 13, 2005*

Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.
RICHARD STALTER: "SOUTHEASTERN COASTAL PLANT COMMUNITIES."

Dick, a professor at St. John's University, will fill us in on some of the Baruch Institute studies that he has conducted in South Carolina.

Location: Bill Paterson Nature Center
Muttontown Preserve, East Norwich

October 11, 2005*

Tuesday, 7:30 p.m.
BRIAN FEIL: "OUR WOODLAND HERITAGE."

This will be a discussion of native trees and their relationships to our nation's history and development. Brian has a degree in horticulture from Farmingdale, has been director at the Clark Garden, and has now been at the Bayard Cutting Arboretum for 29 years, the last seven as director.

Location: Museum of Long Island Natural Sciences
Earth and Space Science Building
Gil Hanson Room (Room 123)
SUNY at Stony Brook, Stony Brook

* Refreshments and informal talk begin at 7:30 p.m.
Formal meeting starts at 8:00 p.m.

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